

Open Research Online

The Open University's repository of research publications and other research outputs

Making Sense of Family Deaths in Urban Senegal: Diversities, Contexts, and Comparisons

Journal Item

How to cite:

McCarthy, Jane Ribbens; Evans, Ruth; Bowlby, Sophie and Wouango, Joséphine (2020). Making Sense of Family Deaths in Urban Senegal: Diversities, Contexts, and Comparisons. OMEGA - Journal of Death and Dying, 82(2) pp. 230–260.

For guidance on citations see [FAQs](#).

© 2018 The Author(s)



<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>

Version: Accepted Manuscript

Link(s) to article on publisher's website:

<http://dx.doi.org/doi:10.1177/0030222818805351>

Copyright and Moral Rights for the articles on this site are retained by the individual authors and/or other copyright owners. For more information on Open Research Online's data [policy](#) on reuse of materials please consult the policies page.

oro.open.ac.uk

Making sense of family deaths in urban Senegal: diversities, contexts and comparisons.

Jane Ribbens McCarthy¹, Ruth Evans², Sophie Bowlby³ and Joséphine Wouango⁴

ABSTRACT⁵

Despite calls for cross-cultural research, Minority world perspectives still dominate death and bereavement studies, emphasising individualised emotions and neglecting contextual diversities. In research concerned with contemporary African societies, on the other hand, death and loss are generally subsumed within concerns about AIDS or poverty, with little attention paid to the emotional and personal significance of a death. Here we draw on interactionist sociology to present major themes from a qualitative study of family deaths in urban Senegal, theoretically framed through the duality of meanings-in-context. Such themes included: family and community as support and motivation; religious beliefs and practices as frameworks for solace and (regulatory) meaning; material circumstances as these are intrinsically bound up with emotions. While we identify the experience of (embodied, emotional) pain as a common response across Minority and Majority worlds, we also explore significant divergencies, varying according to localised contexts and broader power dynamics.

KEYWORDS: family deaths; Africa; materiality; emotions; Islam

Introduction

Diversity in social life is shaped by a multitude of factors: it involves systematic power dynamics, inequalities, and social structures; it also involves the variable meanings people give to their lives and experiences; and these two aspects are inextricably inter-twined. This article focuses primarily

¹ Open University and University of Reading, UK

² University of Reading, UK

³ University of Reading, UK

⁴ University of Liège, Belgium

⁵ **Acknowledgements:** We would like to thank those who have helped with translation, and in particular, Fatou Kébé for her assistance with the fieldwork, and the multiple dimensions of her interpretive input. Also, interviewees and participants without whom this work would not have been possible, and the assistance of our collaborators at University of Cheikh Anta Diop, Dakar, as well as our advisory group members in both Senegal and the UK. Any errors or misunderstandings are ours alone. The research was funded by The Leverhulme Trust, research grant number RPG-2013-336 (2014-16).

on the latter, presenting an analysis of responses to death as expressed by family members in Senegal in West Africa, exploring the ways in which interviewees 'made sense' of their experiences, in the circumstances of their lives. The discussion considers such 'sense-making' in relation to the three main, inter-related, contexts apparent in the interviews: families, religion, and material circumstances. By attending closely to interviewees' own understandings of family deaths, we present some striking themes of both divergence and commonality with 'bereavement'ⁱ experiences as theorised and researched in Anglophone and Western European contexts.

In contemporary globalised worlds, diversities may involve multiple, dynamic, cross-cutting cultures, but despite such manifest diversities, it is still extraordinarily hard to see the depth of 'our own' cultural assumptions and understandings of the world (Klass, 1999): what it means to be a human being, what it means to be a child or a family member, what a 'good life' looks like, what it means to experience a significant death, and what 'support' might entail. Furthermore, the available evidence of how people experience death and its aftermath in diverse Majorityⁱⁱ world contexts has been largely concerned with customs and behaviours rather than meanings and experiences, entailing a 'conceptual and disciplinary split in which the grief of modern Westerners has been psychologised and medicalised, while the mourning or ritual behaviour of pre-modern and non-Western othersⁱⁱⁱ has been exoticised and romanticised' (Valentine, 2006:57). Indeed, as Lofland argued several decades ago, 'what is needed.... is the willingness to replace sweeping generalizations about grief with its careful and delimited depiction' (1985: 181).

When faced with issues of human suffering, such as experiences of death and loss, the empathic human response is generally to seek effective interventions to alleviate the associated pain. Such impulses have arguably shaped contemporary professional practices and social policies with regard to death and 'bereavement' in both Minority and Majority worlds - albeit with different sets of issues in mind - and these in turn have largely shaped the formulation of research agenda. In the affluent contexts of Anglophone and Western European societies, research on death and bereavement has been heavily shaped by professional concerns about how best to assist grieving individuals (e.g. Centre for the Advancement of Health, 2004; Breen and O'Connor, 2007), while in development studies concerned with less affluent societies, research on the emotional significance of death and bereavement has been largely overlooked by a primary focus on immediate issues of survival and economic development (see Evans et al, 2016, for discussion of these literatures).

Consequently, when it comes to contemporary social and emotional responses to death across diverse contexts, the research evidence is very limited. This is despite the development of such sub-disciplines as cross-cultural psychology and transcultural psychiatry, and some notable individuals taking work forwards across the divides of psychiatry and anthropology to the enrichment of each (Kleinman, 2001), or seeking to develop a genuinely cross-cultural body of research on loss and grief (Klass, 1999; Rosenblatt, 2007, 2008). As a result, 'We do not have the cross-cultural evidence to define the characteristics of normal bereavement' (Kleinman, 2007: 819). Yet the sparse psychological literature that does compare responses to death among different ethnicities/nationalities, even when using standardised psychological measures of grief, demonstrates significantly divergent patterns of grieving (Klass, 1999; Bonanno et al., 2005).

The predominance of the Anglophone literature in terms of experiences of 'bereavement', then, is associated with assumptions that such Minority world perspectives and 'knowledge' have universal applicability, implicating political issues of neo-colonial power dynamics (Connell, 2014; Bhabra & Santos, 2017; Ribbens McCarthy and Gillies, 2018). This then obscures the risk that 'bereavement' interventions, formulated within such perspectives, may not be universally appropriate, and may sometimes be positively unhelpful (Kleinman, 2007, 2012). Furthermore, the underpinning taken-for-granted cultural assumptions may also lead such approaches to become unhelpfully narrowed in their application 'at home', over-dependent on professional psycho-therapeutic/ bereavement care expertise, consequently obscuring alternative approaches and cultural resources. Seeking to broaden understandings of how people experience and respond to death, beyond the contexts of contemporary Anglophone and Western European societies, may thus have important benefits in both directions, opening up fresh insights along with new areas for research.

So what scope is there to move beyond the limitations of such bodies of work, to take the leap of imagination to gain insight into their underpinning taken-for-granted assumptions? Attending to different customs and religious beliefs is a start, but only a start. Listening to the voices of people from other countries and contexts about their everyday experiences and understandings of death is also vital. In this article, we offer evidence from interviews about family deaths in urban Senegal, and consider some major surprises and challenges encountered by the UK based research team, giving significant pause for thought about how 'we'^{iv} think about death and bereavement in 'the West'.

Theoretical orientation

In developing our qualitative empirical study of family deaths in West Africa, the work of Klass (1999), calling for a cross-cultural model of 'grief', has been a key starting point. Additionally, we drew theoretically on feminist theorising of care ethics and caringscapes (Bowlby, 2012; Evans, 2012; Ribbens McCarthy, 2012a; Ribbens McCarthy and Prokhovnik, 2014; Tronto, 1993), and the notion of a family death as a 'vital conjuncture' (Johnson-Hanks, 2002; Evans, 2014) that was likely to be associated with significant changes in various aspects of family members' lives. For the present discussion, we also draw on an interactionist sociological approach to discuss how people 'made sense' of family deaths, through a theoretical focus on meanings-in-context.

While others (e.g. Thompson et al., 2016) argue the value of sociological approaches to death, dying and bereavement in general terms, we here present our empirical work through a particular theoretical lens of interactionist sociology. Our approach focuses upon the localised, face-to-face aspects of social lives, while also acknowledging the ways in which such localised interactions are bound up with (globalised) power dynamics, inequalities, and institutional structures^v. An interactionist sociological approach is sparsely apparent in some previous work (notably Lofland, 1985; Nadeau, 1990), while others have taken a broadly social constructionist approach to theorising and researching 'grief' as an emotion (e.g. Wambach, 1986; Rosenblatt, 2001; Walter, 2006; Neimeyer et al., 2014). A particular feature of such a sociological orientation, resonating with anthropological approaches, is that the research does not start with a theoretical model of how 'emotion' may manifest itself and be named, understood or evaluated, thus seeking to have 'fewer cultural blinkers' (Klass, 1999: 160).

In seeking to understand our Senegalese interviews, our primary framework here draws on hermeneutic approaches which put human meaning-making centre stage, as (often taken-for-granted) efforts towards dynamic sense-making, within the circumstances in which people find themselves, giving rise to a view of 'meanings-in-context' (Ribbens McCarthy et al., 2012). As Jakoby (2012) says, 'the issue of meaning is central to the understanding of grief' (p. 686), but two caveats are necessary here: firstly, meanings do not stand alone, since they both constitute, and are constituted by, political, social, material and cultural contexts, in which structures and patterns of power are ever present (Ribbens McCarthy et al., 2012).^{vi} Indeed, Jakoby (2012) points to some of the ways in which power dynamics relate to localised experiences of death, including: the social status and power of the relationship with the deceased; the ways in which resources and social position interact with coping styles; and the significance of socially patterned feeling rules. It is also important to note that meanings may themselves be the site of cultural struggles in many arenas,

including academic debate itself, for example, whether grief and suffering can be usefully understood as a disease (Kleinman & Kleinman, 1991; Kleinman, 2007, 2012; Granek, 2017).

Secondly, while it is possible that an emphasis on meaning may be particularly fruitful for multidisciplinary approaches to understanding experiences of death (and indeed has become a major theme in therapeutic work – Neimeyer, 2001), it is important also to be aware of disciplinary differences in terms of the meaning of ‘meanings’ (Ribbens McCarthy, 2006). Notably, here we use ‘meaning’ as a sociological term rather than a therapeutic one, to refer to the ways in which social actors ‘make sense of’ their experiences and the circumstances in which they find themselves. In this usage, ‘meaning’ is neither more nor less functional, but simply an inevitable core feature of how humans engage with life. While such meanings may sometimes be verbalised^{vii} (as in the present research interviews), they may also be signified in both powerful and mundane ways through symbols, actions, and objects. But, in line with critiques of the dichotomy between grief (as inner feelings) and mourning (as outer practices) (Jakoby, 2012; Klass, 2014), we are not working with a clear boundary between emotion and practice. Indeed, we add a further aspect to this critique when we argue that the distinction between emotional and material dimensions of death is particularly unhelpful and inappropriate in the context of Senegal.

In turn, considerations of ‘context’ implicate a variety of theoretical and empirical frameworks, drawing on multi-disciplinary perspectives, including:

- localized temporal spatial environments
- interactional networks (primary and/or secondary)
- dynamics, structures or spaces of power and resources
- systematically patterned ways of living (including language)
- events/biographies over time.

The immediate contexts of the interviews themselves, of course, presented particular temporal spatial environments and interactional dynamics (Squire, 2008), but aspects of all these contexts were relevant to our interviewees’ meaning-making and each may bring specific aspects of social life into focus. But in using the notion of meanings-in-context we highlight a particular ontology that refuses to see ‘contexts’ as somehow ‘external’ to individuals^{viii}, or meanings as somehow ‘individually created’ outside of context. In this sense, then, contexts cannot be separated from the meanings which help to constitute them, nor meanings from the contexts in which they are embedded.

We next briefly introduce the study and the general Senegalese context, before discussing the analysis of the interviews in terms of three major emergent themes: family relationships; religious frameworks; and material issues, as these are powerfully bound up with meaning-making. In attempting to provide such a holistic overview – one of the potential contributions of a sociological perspective (Thompson et al., 2016) – our discussion of each theme is necessarily brief, but we seek to convey some major meanings-in-context, as participants sought to ‘make sense’ of their experiences. Finally, we offer a brief tentative discussion of how these findings highlight broad divergences and commonalities (Jullien, 2008/2014) with experiences of death in (diverse) Anglophone and Western European societies.

Researching experiences of family deaths in urban Senegalese contexts

Our study provides the first in-depth understanding of responses to death, care and family relations in a contemporary urban West African context. We aimed to investigate the material and emotional significance of the death of a close adult relative for family members, undertaking interviews with two members of each family, where possible of different generations. Altogether, we interviewed 59 family members living in a range of circumstances, contacted through local NGO and community leaders^{ix}. We also undertook 17 interviews with local, municipal, NGO and religious leaders, and held focus groups with young people and with adult women, involving a further 24 individuals.^x Additionally, a total of eight workshops, involving previous interviewees and focus group participants, as well as government and non-governmental representatives and Islamic and local leaders, were held a year and a half later, as part of a participatory dissemination process. This enabled us to present our on-going analysis, ask for more extensive clarification on certain issues, and discuss our interim conclusions.

Our analysis combined thematic and inter-generational case study approaches, paying close attention to language and styles of talk (Callaghan et al., 2015; Evans et al., 2017a). The latter presented significant challenges, with major overall differences from the in-depth individualised narrative style of ‘grief journeys’ apparent in qualitative studies in Minority world contexts (e.g. Wambach, 1986; Valentine, 2008). While we started out using open-ended life history approaches, in-depth accounts of individual life courses were almost entirely unforthcoming. By contrast, detailed accounts of the death of their family member often provided vivid narratives of events and experiences leading up to, and at the time of, the death, but with few accounts of what might be described by more psychologically-oriented theorists as an ‘inner’ psychological grief process over

time after the death. Analysis therefore involved detailed processes of translation, interpretation, and pain-staking reflexive discussions within the team of five researchers, drawing on the voice-centred relational method (Mauthner & Doucet, 2008) and an ethic of care framework (Evans et al., 2017b), to develop some understanding of the experiences being conveyed^{xi}. Our overall endeavour comes close to the vision of Kleinman & Kleinman (1991), in which we seek to understand 'local moral worlds ... not as a representation of some other reality (one that we experts possess special power over) but rather as an evocation of close experience that stands for itself' (p. 293).

In broad brush strokes, setting the general scene for our localised study, Senegal is sometimes described as having a triple cultural heritage, of African, Islamic and French colonialist origins (Bass and Sow, 2006). Although the majority of the population (94%) practise Sufi Islam, it is a secular State, with a plural legal framework (Bass and Sow, 2006; Evans, 2015a). A minority of the population (4%) are Christians (primarily Roman Catholic), or animists or other religions (2%) (ANSD, 2013). In Senegal, Islam is often practised through affiliation to a variety of hereditary brotherhoods (four main ones) which have significant political presence, while Catholicism is part of the French colonial legacy. At the same time, these classifications cannot be used to necessarily indicate everyday religious practices and beliefs, since all religions become significantly inflected by local customs and contexts (Wikan, 1988), and religious meanings will be drawn upon and adapted by people in their everyday lives (Klass, 1999). Indeed, Villalón (1999) describes maraboutage (following a particular religious leader who is considered to have powers to manipulate spiritual forces) as carefully cultivated in all spheres of life in contemporary Senegal, while Gifford (2016) suggests that Islamic practices may consequently become bound up with traditional African practices. In our own interviews, brotherhoods were rarely mentioned, but there was considerable syncretism between customary practices linked to ethnicity and religious practices, which were nevertheless predominantly framed in religious terms.

In recent years, Senegal has seen significant increases in its urban population, constituting 45% of the total population in 2013 (ANSD, 2014). Our research was located in two major cities, Dakar and Kaolack, focusing on two contrasting localities in each, one more central and one more peripheral. Chronic poverty affects 27% of households in Dakar and 37% in other cities (Fall et al., 2011), while the majority of children in Senegal as a whole are at risk of one or more indicators of multiple deprivation (MEFP et al., 2014). The population is diverse in terms of ethnicities, with Wolof being the largest, and some evidence suggests that ethnicity may be linked to poverty (Fall et al., 2011). Mortality statistics are compromised by the low level of registration of deaths, but overall life

expectancy was stated to be 65 years in 2013 (ASND, 2014), while the mortality rate is lower in the Dakar region (at 5.2%) than in any other city or area (7.6% in Kaolack) (ibid).

The majority of households in Senegal have an extended family structure, with urban households somewhat smaller (average of seven members) than rural ones (average of ten) (ANSD, 2014), but with household sizes comparatively larger than elsewhere in Western or Central Africa (Jacquemin, 2010). African customs of fosterage are apparent, with almost one third of households either sending or receiving foster children (Beck et al., 2015). The majority of the population are married in monogamous unions, but over a third of married people live in polygamous arrangements (ANSD, 2014).

The scarce literature available on death in Senegal highlights the social importance of funeral and widowhood practices across ethnic groups (Thomas, 1968/2013; Faye, 1997; Ndiaye, 2009). Despite their restrictive and potentially coercive nature, Ndiaye (2012) suggests that widowhood practices may be regarded as a form of healing, individually and collectively. In relation to burial, funeral arrangements, mourning and inheritance, practices are said to have mingled Islamic, Christian and indigenous expectations and traditions (Sow, 2013).

We turn next to explore family and community networks as key sites of meanings-in-context for experiences of death and loss. We focus here on the family death itself and the practical and emotional implications. The longer term consequential changes in people's lives and relationships are beyond the scope of the present discussion (but see Bowlby et al., in progress).

Family and community as contexts and support

...You should be considerate towards the family; rich or poor; family is family. Because when you're rich today; tomorrow you can be poor! Even if you're rich you consider your family. You're behind your family; everything they have, you take part in. The day when you have nothing left; they'll help you. But when you have no regard for your family; you won't see them; whether you're happy or having troubles! And that's dangerous; that's part of African family life. (Simone, 39 year old widow)

...it's sacred for us... A family's very important; that's what we're living here for. They're not a nuclear family; we're together and cohesion reigns amongst us; it's very important and

without the family, we're nothing. Without friends we're nothing; without neighbours, we're nothing... (Boubacar, aged 44, brother to the deceased)

The family is very important for me... because if I cry and I see them beside me, it's as if I have everything I need beside me. (N'Della, aged 19, daughter of deceased father)

When you have misfortune, your family is there to give you the courage to go forward. (Magatte, aged 17, daughter of deceased father)

'Bereavement' in predominant Anglophone perspectives is largely seen as something that happens to an individual, who has experienced a personal 'loss', provoking an emotional intra-psychic challenge. But while in all societies, whether recognised or not, a death also has broader social implications, it has been suggested that in Africa particularly, death is understood first and foremost as a community event (Nwoye, 2000, 2005 discussed by Njue et al., 2015), in societies which place central importance on the 'family'.

In our interviews, it became quickly apparent how much family members relied on each other, for daily survival, emotional and practical support, for opportunities 'to succeed' in life, and to manage in times of crisis, all of which fundamentally shaped the meaning of the death. Furthermore, while the term 'family' itself has been extensively debated and explored in academic work (Ribbens McCarthy and Edwards, 2011), for our interviewees it was an understanding of 'family' as a collective unit that predominated (Ribbens McCarthy, 2012b), with the survival of this unit as a crucial concern after a significant family death (Nordanger, 2007), resonating with the African concept of 'ubuntu' (discussed below).

We're united. My aunts; my mother's younger sisters often come here and we meet. We talk, we drink tea like we used to when my mother was here. We're really united. (Abdoulaye, 30 year old son of deceased mother)

The family is important because it's a source of union. There's strength in unity. (Samba, aged 50, after the death of his grandmother)

The importance of a family is that it enables its members to unite; to help each other. (Baba, aged 14, son of deceased mother)

While African families are said to be characterized by considerable diversity, nevertheless, Oheneba-Sakyi and Takyi (2006) argue that most African countries share common themes, such as an emphasis on the extended family, multiple marriage forms, high levels of childbearing, differentiated gender roles, and strong intergenerational ties, constituting, 'a dynamic social institution with

members coming and going' (p. 2). A household can be defined as having members who do not necessarily reside in it, but to which they contribute economically and socially, and more than one household may therefore claim an individual as a member (Bass and Sow, 2006). 'Families' are largely (but not exclusively – Diop, 1985/2012) understood in terms of blood relationships but these ties could also extend to close neighbours and friends^{xii}. Furthermore, reciprocity is central to such personal ties and informal relationships (Lyenda and Simon, 2006).

Our research accords well with these broad themes. We found that highly complex urban family and kinship networks, based in fluid and sometimes dispersed households linked to particular rural villages, work very differently in Senegal compared to Western European and Anglophone societies. Since family ties were pervasively described as absolutely central for any sense of security, it seemed to be generally imperative to maintain family relationships at all costs. This could be both a source of constraint and of great support after a death. A few interviewees thus referred to disputes about inheritance, but might prefer not to express their views to other family members: *'It wouldn't have made any sense to quarrel. I preferred to let it go'* (Cheikh, aged 77, son of deceased mother) while others spoke warmly of family support:

They've supported me like my father, they've supported me like my mother. (Selbe, aged 13, daughter of deceased father)

If the family wasn't there to help, that'd be difficult for us. If the whole family died like my father; that'd be very difficult for us and people sometimes need support. (Chérif, aged 23)

While the impact on the family as a unit might be a significant aspect of the loss, family was thus also a key support for most (although not all) of our interviewees, and might form a strong motivation for the future, as people – young and old - worked towards the 'success' of the family as a collective whole (discussed further in Bowlby et al, in progress). As Khoury (a 67 year old widow) said, *'If the children make it, it's like I've made it'*. Seynabour (aged 29, whose brother had died) commented:

Only God knows the future but we must be courageous and hard working. I want to find work to help my mother.

Sibling ties across the lifecourse were also strongly emphasised by many, with concomitant expressions of a sense of responsibility. Thus Allassane (aged 36, whose mother had died), when asked, 'What's most important for the future of your brothers and sisters?' replied, *'We meet every Sunday to discuss projects, we share the same projects'*. And as Boubacar (aged 44) said of his older brother's death:

It encourages me to be more involved... Even if it isn't financial or something else, at least the moral aspect, the support he gave the family... so the day I should go, others can say I'd supported the family.

The death of a close family member therefore needs to be understood according to these meanings of family as a cohesive support system comprised of a flexible set of relationships that are central to life, in the context of the on-going struggle for survival and stability, and the absence of any systematic formal welfare provisions (Evans et al, 2016). Such meanings of family were shaped by wider communal ideals and values of 'unity', 'solidarité' and social cohesion.

Indeed, the overwhelming majority of our interviewees reported receiving financial and moral support from such informal networks immediately after the death of their relative.^{xiii} Relatives, friends and neighbours organised arrangements for the burial, provided condolence money, offered advice and guidance, and helped them not to feel alone.

... the whole family, neighbours, everyone comes and everyone tries to comfort you. There's also the moral support. People also give something to contribute even if only on the first day. (Boubacar, aged 44, after the death of his brother).

Beyond the initial involvement of a wide circle of people, Safia (aged 35, deceased mother) expressed how much she valued the on-going moral support she received from her mother's family:

They didn't leave me. [...] They didn't leave me; my cousins. They call me. My older brothers, my uncles, they didn't leave me. Ah, yes. If they'd left me, I don't know what I'd be like now'.

And even where family members are unable to provide material support, interviewees referred to the importance of their love, comfort and prayers. *'Members of my family can't afford much but they all love me'* (Salimata, 62 year old widow).

Younger people also spoke of the importance of the support from their friends: *'It was very difficult for me at the beginning but my friends who live in the neighbourhood were there every day'* (Fatoumata, aged 21, after the death of her brother). N'diogou, a young man aged 29 who had lost his mother, was a lone more critical voice in our interviews, when he said, *'You know, after a death, people don't even have the time to look at you'*.

We found it initially quite paradoxical, then, how far the language of being *'alone'*, *'empty'*, in a *'void'* [French, *un vide*] (Evans et al., 2017a), was pervasively apparent in the interviews.

I feel alone today. (N'daye, aged 17, after the death of her mother)

Alone, I feel alone. (N'dioug, 63 year old widower)

My mother was my confidante. We used to talk, we supported each other. You feel that there's really a void there. (Ibrahima, aged 44, after the death of his mother)

This seemed to imply something quite fundamental about the absence of the deceased, evoking a deep sense of loneliness despite the presence of others. Indeed, Jacquemin (2010) suggests that solitude and isolation in Africa (more than elsewhere) is seen as a sign of loss of social status and support. Buju (2003) suggests that African morality is related directly to a sense of communal embeddedness and societal bearing, referring to the (complex) notion of 'ubuntu' – 'I am because we are one' (discussed by Nel, 2008). This resonates strongly with Boubacar's remark about the collective impact of the death of his brother: 'There is something in us which has gone and we can't get it back' (aged 44). For our interviewees, the meaning of their loss thus reflected a deep sense of loss of connectedness, a rent in the social fabric, which in the immediate aftermath of the death may be assuaged by family and friends' co-presence. Following the mourning period, however, many participants, especially widows struggling to support their children, commented that the loss and sense of being alone was felt much more keenly. .

We also noted in our analysis how the person who had died was most often described in terms of their family role, rather than their particular personality. Some interviewees and many workshop participants described how the deceased relative who had died, particularly a mother or father, was 'irreplaceable' because of the part they had played within the family unit as a whole.

...for us Africans, the eldest [brother] is the father, that's all. When he dies he also leaves a void. (Boubacar, aged 44, after the death of his brother)

...a mother's irreplaceable. You feel that there's always something missing. (N'diogou, aged 29, after the death of his mother)

Amongst the few interviewees who described the character of the deceased, this generally involved reference to someone with a strong personality, who made an impression on those around:

I know she was a great lady, a fighter certainly. Really, she was a woman with a strong personality. (N'diaw, 55 year old widower)

Overall, then, we can see that family is crucial for understanding the meaning of *what* it is that has been lost with the death and its impact (Rosenblatt, 2008), both in terms of the particular relationships and the broader contexts of our interviewees' lives. We turn next to consider the

religious context in terms of everyday religious meanings and *how* these shaped *responses* to the death.

Religious meanings as comfort and control

It's very hard but I left everything in God's hands.[...]It's God that brought her onto earth and God who took her back, and nobody will escape that day. (Abdoulaye, 30 year old Muslim after death of his mother).

It was hard. I couldn't sleep at first but in the end I realised it was God's will. (Cheik, aged 77, Muslim, after the death of his mother)

Being Muslim, I can only trust in God. It's He who'd given him to me, it's He who took him. I can do nothing. (Safietou, aged 50, after death of her son)

It's when we're tested. It's for that, in Wolof they say "Natu". Natu is something we say that measures your faith. God does it to measure your faith; to see how far your faith goes; the depth of your faith. (Roman Catholic priest)

If families are one aspect of the communal framing of death and loss in Senegal, religion provides another communal worldview, and support networks that are central to the organisation of social life, as described earlier, with major implications for responses to death. This contrasts with affluent Anglophone and Western European worlds, which:

...celebrate individual freedom and personal autonomy. Many westerners therefore feel grief should reflect not community or religious expectations but the griever's unique personal attachment to the deceased. (Walter, 2017: 92)

Furthermore, even in the US where religious affiliations are much stronger than in Western Europe, religion (primarily Protestant Christianity) has been theorised and researched almost entirely in terms of *individual religious beliefs* rather than religion as community and culture (Becker et al, 2007). It is noteworthy, by contrast, how far the various forms of Islam emphasise community rather than individual beliefs (Esposito, 2018), linked perhaps to the perceived role of Islam as a central organising feature of communal life (Bass and Sow, 2006; Creevey, 1996).

Indeed, while family in Senegal may be seen as the basic fabric and motivation of much of everyday living and survival, religious frameworks were key to the ways in which many interviewees sought to make sense of the death, and to cope with their feelings (Evans et al, 2018, in press). It was clear

that religion could be extremely valuable in these regards, although it could also act as a form of social regulation. This was true for both Muslim and Catholic interviewees, although there were also differences in practices between the two main religious groups in our sample (for more details see Evans et al, 2016, 2018).

The religious framing was thus a key underpinning for the acceptance of the death itself, along with practices for the care of the dead, as well as solace and consolation for the living (Klass, 2014). In these regards, Islamic religion as a feature of social life has to be understood in terms of its specificities in Senegal, as outlined earlier, inflected also with long-standing ethnic values and practices. Thus N'diougba (a 63 year old widower) explained that the Wolof word " *Mounieul*" , translatable as 'endurance', was often used in relation to the need to accept death, in a way that resonates strongly with the view of 'accepting God's Will' expressed by many Muslims:

Like they say in Wolof, "Mounieul" [you must persevere]; that is, you must be aware that everything perishes so it's not worth creating a drama. You must remain strong; everyone does, yes, even women.

At the same time, while in Minority worlds a medical framework is almost always a central and predominant part of narrating the 'cause of death' even for those with clear religious beliefs, in our Senegalese interviews any medical framing of the death was often either very low-key or could be absent altogether. Just over one third of interviewees used a medical term in their accounts of the death, while roughly even numbers either described physical symptoms, or did not specify/did not know what illness their relative had experienced (about one third of younger people, and one fifth of older people falling into the last category).

Participants' accounts thus rarely gave medical details, with the most frequently mentioned biomedical references concerning chronic illnesses such as high blood pressure, diabetes, or cancer. Yet many of the Senegalese interviewees gave detailed narratives of the circumstances and events surrounding the death, indicating a form of meaning-making around the death that may not be recognised as a 'causal' explanation in more Anglophone terms (Eisenbruch & Handelman, 1990; Sogolo, 2003). Besides a few intimations of mystical illnesses, other sorts of accounts for the death might also be hinted at. For example, in the case of older deceased family members, some were reported to have had some sense of premonition – '*Maybe she had death sickness... she knew she was going to die*' (Samba, aged 51, speaking of his grandmother). Premonitions might also be hinted at through narratives of warning events that had occurred in the lead up to an unexpected and/or violent death of a younger person. These participants thus appeared to make sense of the death,

especially untimely and accidental deaths, through thinking about events and interactions with the deceased in the days before the death. These features of the interviews perhaps chime with Gifford's (2016) comments about the significance of 'an enchanted religious imagination' in Senegalese life, which may be associated with a holistic narrative of the death invoking a sense of destiny or fate, rather than a search for causality in Anglophone and Western European terms.

By far the most frequently cited way of making sense of and accommodating the death in continuing everyday lives was that it was 'God's Will', which was mentioned spontaneously by a quarter of participants, both Catholics and Muslims, particularly the older generation (discussed further in Evans et al., 2018, in press). Furthermore, while it was a minority who referred to God's Will in narrating the death itself, it was apparent across all the interviews that religion was the primary, socially approved, source of comfort, and for Muslim interviewees particularly, this included accepting the death as 'God's Will', since 'Islam means submission to the Will of Allah' (Alladin, 2015 p. 112). Additionally, though, accepting God's Will meant that 'too many tears' might be discouraged. So, while religious beliefs were clearly important and a source of meaning and solace for many people, they could also be linked to an idea that too much weeping and audible distress is unacceptable as it reveals an inability to accept God's Will. Thus Ibrahima (aged 44) expressed his private shame at his inability to 'accept' his mother's death two years previously:

...this gap we're still feeling until now. Sorrow; I'm even ashamed to think of her to tell you the truth, because I still haven't accepted this death. I pretend that she's still here. That's what helps us to keep going.

Additionally, at a practical level, all the burials and funerals were organised in religious terms, carefully following the prescribed customs for preparation of the body, burial, funerals, and mourning practices, although it was clear at times that these were also inflected with ethnic customs, and with gender and generational differences (Evans et al., 2016). Amongst Muslims, burials, and any subsequent visits to the cemetery, were thus very much matters for adult men. On the other hand, widowhood practices were important for women but not for men. Such customs were very much understood as religious and cultural practices, rather than expressions of emotional responses, and were followed by all the bereaved wives in our study, including one who had been divorced from her husband for many years.

No other family members were expected to follow specific mourning customs, but there were descriptions of practices of giving offerings, praying for the dead, and remembering the deceased in religious anniversary events (see Evans et al., 2018, in press). There was the possibility too that

bereaved family members might find that the death strengthened their religious beliefs and practices, or that religious faith was an important legacy from their deceased relative. As Ouly (aged 31) commented about her mother: *'She had faith and she asked us to be pious and to have faith'*. In these various ways, then, religious meanings were invoked as central frameworks for understanding the death, and for making sense of how to respond.

The emotional life of materiality

It's my father who took care of us. And when he passed away there were some relatives who helped us at first but after they said they couldn't any more. At the moment we're managing to eat and go to school. (Oulilmata, aged 18)

Q: What are the changes that have appeared in your mother's life since your father's death? *She's more tired, because every day it's her that looks for the money. Sometimes she doesn't manage to have enough. (Lamine, aged 13, after death of his father)*

I have a heavy heart when I experience an unhappy event like bereavement. I even ask myself what I'm doing in this life. I cry when I sometimes don't have anything to give my children to eat; and my brothers' and sisters' children who are in my care. It makes me feel very bad. (Anthiou, 57 year old aunt whose niece had died)

'It was my brother who used to go and look for water. He would take a cart (and horse) to go and get water. And now, it's my sister and me who do it. [...] In any case, every day I go to school after having done the housework. When I finish I go and get water'. (Hawa, aged 16)

In this third substantive section, we bring into focus the material contexts of these narratives of family deaths, considering how interviewees' made sense of the death in circumstances which often entailed a basic shortage of resources and a pervasive sense of precariousness (as apparent also in some of the earlier quotes about the significance of family support). For people living in such difficult circumstances, it has sometimes been suggested that there is little scope for 'emotions', which may perhaps be regarded as a 'luxury' (Demmer, 2007). However, this may in itself reflect the assumptions of affluent Minority worlds, and Western European categorical thinking (Jullien, 2014), which sharply demarcate between 'emotions' and 'materiality', as well as between subjective and objective worlds, in which the objective material world is seen to be 'external' to individual consciousness and emotion. In this section we seek to set such assumptions to one side and explore the intricate *interweaving* of emotional and material experiences.

These understandings of resource-constrained contexts such as Senegal therefore raise particular theoretical issues which entail stepping outside mainstream 'Western' cultures even more markedly

than considerations of family and religious contexts. Here it is particularly important to keep in mind the significance of meanings-in-context, since, from an Anglophone perspective, material objects are generally regarded as existing independently of their socially constructed meanings.^{xiv} A focus on meanings-in-context challenges such an ontological position, bringing meanings into play as themselves *constituting* the material world in significant ways, even as materiality constitutes a crucial context *towards which* meanings are invoked and created in processes of sense-making.

The somatization of grief has been recognised by researchers for some time in many cultural contexts (Horowitz and Wakefield, 2007; Rosenblatt, 2008), including, to some degree, the embodied experience of loss and relationality after death in Anglophone countries (e.g. Ribbens McCarthy and Prokhovnik, 2014). Thus, ‘emotions’ may be experienced in embodied terms rather than through verbal expressions of an internal state of feelings. This was clearly part of the experiences of our Senegalese participants:

The relative is part of the family. Whatever their age if you lose a relative it's as if you've lost a part of your own body. (Focus group participant)

The [children] all got sick. Even her over there, if she has a headache and thinks of her father, she starts crying. (Athia, 56 year old widow)

At the beginning it was very hard. I got thin. But I got better, being a Muslim. (Safietou, aged 50, son died five years previously)

In reviewing accounts of the body and materiality in Anglophone and Western European societies, Hallam and Hockey (2001) evidence the ways in which a particular notion of the body emerged historically, as a bounded entity, separate from an external material world, and with an (emotional, subjective) interiority that was conceived as potentially hidden and private. Attention has also been paid to materiality in terms of the significance of objects as constituting memories and connections with the deceased (e.g. Miller and Parrott, 2009).

An exploration of these significant theoretical issues is beyond the scope of the present article. But in discussing the material circumstances narrated in interviewees' accounts of family death in Senegal, two points are crucial. Firstly, materiality appears not only in terms of memorializing and transitional objects, but also as a fundamental feature of what it is that constitutes the loss associated with the death. In this regard, responses to death have a material core which is particularly evident in such resource-constrained contexts. Secondly, while there was little discussion in the interviews of an interior emotional experience of loss and grief over time, we do not interpret this as meaning an absence or limitation of emotional experience. Indeed, brief but

powerful evocations of emotional pain were apparent in many interviews. Rather, we seek here to develop a more holistic view of emotion as bound up with the materiality of experience. In this sense, accounts of the material circumstances associated with the death (particularly noticeable among widows struggling to provide for their children), may be understood, at the same time, *in themselves* to be narratives of emotions.

Thus, while contemporary Anglophone research and literature has primarily neglected the material significance of bereavement (with some limited exceptions, especially more recently^{xv} e.g. Marris, 1958/2014; Woodthorpe et al., 2013; Corden & Hirst, 2014), the meaning of family death for the Senegalese interviewees was deeply embedded within its material significance. . In this regard:

- material hardships had emotional consequences,
- material objects might provide important links with the deceased, and
- emotional responses to what was understood to have been lost might be expressed through material issues.

And it is this last feature which perhaps stands furthest outside of long-standing Anglophone perspectives.

For these Senegalese households, the death of an adult family member might have very serious material consequences - aspects of family death which have featured prominently in existing African research literatures (discussed in Evans et al., 2016). Interviewees' narratives resonate with this expectable pattern, with consequences ranging from children's maintenance and school attendance, to the entire household sliding into chronic poverty, or even being dispersed, with fosterage of children being part of some accounts. Alongside the practical tasks of daily living, the need to meet the costs of housing, property and rent in urban areas featured often. And while the broader support from family and neighbours was much valued, some interviewees mentioned how this might be quite short-term, or less available to those from family networks or neighbourhoods with fewer resources. Material support (as one-off financial or practical provision) from other agencies, such as local government, NGOs or employers, was even more sparse and idiosyncratic (mentioned by six interviewees), and almost all interviewees said they were not aware of any such formal support being available. But for some (six interviewees), membership of a women's rotating credit and savings collective (*tontine*) to which they had made regular contributions in the past, or belonging to a youth or cultural association, might be a (short-term) source of financial support, while a further five had received such support from religious, educational or other local leaders. Inheritance practices, and the sharing of the deceased's belongings according to Islamic customs, was usually expected in Muslim families and was arranged between family members, occasionally with the

involvement of an imam (see Evans 2015; 2018, in press). The material and emotional significance of inheritance objects and possessions might be bound up together, an experience that perhaps resonates across both Majority and Minority worlds (Finch and Mason, 2000). Djibril (aged 42) explained that his aunt's daughter, who used to sleep in the room with her, was allowed to keep her mother's clothes and other belongings:

I think that maman's clothes are still in the wardrobe until now. They suggested taking out the clothes and sharing them with relatives so that each family member can have a souvenir of maman but [...] they didn't want to insist too much because as maman's daughter, she was too attached to her, they didn't want to push her...

In this case and in a few other families, the sharing out of the deceased's belongings was portrayed as a difficult emotional experience. Some wanted to be rid of the deceased's belongings quickly, while others simply did not want to be part of the sharing out. Allassane (aged 36) left the house when he found family members sharing the inheritance after the death of his mother, and commented, *'Even members of the family cry when you tell them, this is their part of the inheritance'* – although some also spoke of tensions around sharing of the belonging of the deceased. Further, beyond inheritances, on-going reminders of the deceased were very frequently described in material or embodied terms in the interviews, featuring places and objects such as furniture or clothing, food, or photos, as well as particular activities.

The emotional aspects of such material remembrances have been recognised in some Anglophone discussions (e.g. Hallam & Hockey, 2001; Miller & Parrott, 2009) but some narratives of loss from our Senegalese interviewees referred to personalised aspects of the material consequences of the death without giving voice to any explicit emotional indications of 'grief'.

When he used to come home, he usually brought bread, local yogurt, and since the start of Ramadan, I still hadn't seen the bread that he used to bring home. (Selbe, aged 13, after the death of her father)

When he received [money], he gave all the money, and I managed the house... I cry each time I have problems.... I think of my eldest daughter's schooling and the rent. I'm responsible for all that and I can't afford it. (Simone, 39 year old widow)

He used to give me money and that made me happy, whatever the amount. (Diarry, 44 year old widow)

Here, emotional connections and care are expressed through material and practical support for the family; the loss of the relationship and all the emotions that surrounds this, is thus denoted through

the lack of such on-going support. From a contemporary Anglophone perspective, to refer to personalised remembrances in such material terms might be interpreted as indicating an instrumental, materialist, attitude to relationships. But we suggest this imposes an interpretation – judgement even – based on a distinction between material and emotional life that may be specific to contemporary affluent Anglophone and Western European contexts (as discussed above). Where material circumstances impose everyday hardships and struggles to meet basic needs, the emotional pain and the material consequences of the death are such that one compounds the other, in ways which are hard to comprehend for those from more affluent circumstances, sometimes leading to fearfulness and even despair. Indeed, the Wolof word for loss is '*niak*', which can also mean *lacking*, *nothing to lose* or *poor*. The multiple meanings of the Wolof word *niak* suggest how the death of a relative may have interlinked emotional and material consequences, which is not conveyed through the French (*perte*) or English words for loss (Evans et al., 2017a). As a Roman Catholic priest said, when it's an '*economic void*' as well as a social and emotional void, '*that has another dimension, and that is felt even more painfully*'.

Many interviewees, particularly young people, gave very brief elaborations of their feelings in direct terms: '*I felt bad*'; '*It hurt*'; '*I was sad*'; '*I was grief-stricken*'. With so little direct elaboration in our interviews, it becomes difficult to interpret emotional experience. The Wolof phrase, *dafa meti* (*c'est dur/it's hard*), for example, was used in the vast majority (80%) of the family interviews, often multiple times. It was used both to describe emotional responses to the death, as well as difficult material circumstances and struggles to support the family in other parts of the interview. This brief language of '*it's hard*', was very striking and powerful, potentially encompassing a range of complex feelings and material hardships, bound up together, and linking also with the notions of '*Mounieul*'/ endurance and *niak*/ loss - also meaning poor – discussed above.

Emotions may thus be interwoven with material circumstances in complex ways, such that it may not be appropriate to understand them separately in many African contexts (Cole and Thomas, 2009). And collective feeling rules, or emotional regimes (Reddy, 2001), may mean that this is seen as an entirely appropriate response to death – as seen with the Senegalese religious framework discussed above which inhibits the outward expression of 'too much' emotion. This perhaps resonates in a UK context with the inhibitions (eg. the 'stiff upper lip') of emotional expression of grief (in public at least) in relation to the levels of loss experienced during the two major twentieth century wars (Jalland, 2013), when particular feeling rules were encouraged in ways considered important towards the needs of the continuing war effort.

Making sense of family deaths: some brief comparisons and conclusions.

There are no worldwide standards for determining whose view of how to deal with death is most valid... [and] no emotions or emotional expressions that are universally present at a death.(Rosenblatt, 2015, p. 28)

In conclusion we consider Rosenblatt's statement in the light of our discussion of family deaths in urban Senegal. Our analysis has invoked a sociological notion of meanings-in-context, bringing into focus the ways in which people seek to make sense of their experiences in the contexts of their everyday circumstances. This differs from more directly interventionist, therapeutically oriented approaches that seek to evaluate what contributes towards 'healthy' or 'unhealthy' bereavement, since, as Rosenblatt cautions, we lack the basis for determining such judgements. Indeed, our more sociological approach hopes to shed light on diversity in people's everyday responses to family deaths, and in the process, enable reflection on features of Minority world cultures that are taken for granted (Klass, 1999). Our theoretical framework points to the likelihood that meanings-in-context are indeed likely to vary systematically between varying cultural locations, in terms of how certain aspects of the potential pain and disruption of death are made more or less visible, and experienced as more or less problematic (with due regard to Lukes', 2008, caveat about the limitations of moral spreadsheets of gains and losses). And at the same time, we are mindful of Jullien's (2008/2014) discussion of the immense difficulties in exploring what may be 'common' and what may 'diverge' across diverse linguistic and cultural contexts,^{xvi} as well as Squire's (2008) caution against losing sight of the particularities of personal narratives while seeking to understand the genres of their cultural contexts.

A major risk is the creation of stereotypes of 'cultures' as fixed, monolithic entities, in which divergences are highlighted as categorical 'differences', failing to take account of the fluidity and intersectionality of such patterns, while also overlooking what is common across diverse contexts. For example, there has been a view that affluent Minority worlds have developed an inability to deal with death, breaking the continuity between approaches to life and death found in other societies (Palgi & Abramovitch, 1984). But this may underestimate the struggles also occasioned by death in Majority^{xvii} worlds (Folta & Deck, 1988).

Certainly, the narratives of our participants resonate across Senegalese and UK contexts in that the pain of particular deaths may be felt deeply – albeit expressed verbally in very divergent ways. People may thus commonly struggle to deal with the consequences, as well as finding comfort from

memories of their deceased relative, and the impact they are considered to have had on their lives (discussed further in Evans et al., 2016; Evans et al., 2018, in press). But they also diverge in significant and patterned ways that result from the fact that the death is about a (set of) relationship/s which is/are embedded in, and shaped by, particular material, social, economic, historical, and political contexts. In these regards, it is important to consider both the immediate contexts of our interviewees' family lives and relationships, but also broader structural issues including religious, political and economic processes and power dynamics more broadly as these play out in, and are themselves shaped by, local contexts (Harris, 2010).

The focus on meanings-in-context draws attention to the personal experience of both **what** is lost and **how** to respond. In this article, we have particularly considered just three major contexts, of family, religion, and materiality, while other major issues, of varying degrees of generality, have been omitted or only briefly referred to, ranging from broad political contexts, social dynamics of gendered and generational power relations, to specific circumstances such as the age of person who died, and whether expected or not. At the same time, it is important to recognise that the distinction we have made here between family, religious and material contexts is a heuristic device, since in practice these are themselves deeply intertwined to provide an overall fabric for living, albeit there may also be multiple contradictions, nuances and complexities. This interweaving of various threads can be seen in the following example, comprising elements of religion, materiality and family obligations, in which Simone, a 39 year old Catholic widow, relates how her children had spoken of the promise their now-deceased father had made the previous Christmas, of a Christmas tree the following year, and they had remembered this.

I said, 'But God is all powerful. I don't have money but God can bring someone who'll bring money and we'll buy other trees.' And it's as if he himself has heard my prayers! The president of my association, and the treasurer... they gave me an envelope... so the next day I bought the fir... I did everything! You see what that did for them? I told them, 'You see, your papa sent people to give us money. You see, you should never say, "never"'... Papa had said it and he kept his word...' And it really helped them. (Simone, 39 year old Catholic widow)

A family death thus not only ends a specific dyadic relationship, it also disrupts, and in some cases rends, the social and material fabric in which people's lives are embedded, and through which their personal place and bodily survival in the world is secured (Nordanger, 2007). From our Senegalese interviews, we find that what is lost through the death may include the particular role played by the deceased in the web of family relationships; the practical support they had provided; and their friendship, companionship and advice; while the gap that is left is expressed in the language of the

void, of being alone, and the material consequences of the loss. Religious beliefs and practices may, to varying degrees, be brought into play in terms of giving meaning to the death and the need for 'accepting God's will', as well as providing widely shared practices and customs for communal responses to the death and its aftermath (Evans et al., 2018, in press). But both religious and family contexts are played out in and through material terms, in circumstances of considerable hardship, and such material dimensions can themselves be understood as both deeply expressive of, and bound up with, the emotional consequences of the death.

Overall, then, our discussion raises the possibility of tentative points of comparison between these Senegalese interviews (bearing in mind the particularities of our sample), and research concerning 'bereavement' in UK contexts^{xviii}, pointing towards what we might consider (from the first three primarily Anglophone UK perspective) to be strengths and limitations of each, including such issues as:

Senegal

- *Strengths: strong immediate family and community support that also provides motivation for 'carrying on'; a framework for acceptance of the death; shared customs that provide consolation.*
- *Limitations: little on-going recognition of impact of loss or long-term support; few opportunities for explicit emotional expression.*

UK

- *Strengths: attention to the individual emotional impact, as a process involving some sense of personal 'recovery'.*
- *Limitations: little recognition of social implications and social context + little social support; little basis for acceptance of the death; neglect of material implications.*

Almost two decades ago, Klass (1999) called for limited but open-minded research by which 'we' may seek to understand 'our own culture' better, but also learn deeply about another 'tradition', not in terms of its 'official' version but in terms of how it is actually experienced. We note that this call seems to have gone largely unheeded. We hope that our study has reaffirmed the value of such an approach, both in the contextualised understanding of experiences of family death, and what may be learned about key dimensions of its diversity.

ⁱ The Anglophone language used to refer to experiences of death in itself risks conveying particular assumptions and obscuring diversities, see Evans et al 2017a.

-
- ⁱⁱ The political terms ‘Minority’ and ‘Majority’ worlds, like many other binary concepts such as global North/South, Western/non-Western, risk stereotyping differences and obscuring diversities. For these reasons, we primarily use spatial terms instead, but Minority/Majority does have the capacity to highlight the extent to which contemporary global power and knowledge is located in contexts that are historically and numerically very specific - see Punch (2016).
- ⁱⁱⁱ The terms ‘Westerners’ and ‘modernity’ have both been strongly critiqued at times, not least because of the consequential post-colonial deficit terms of ‘non-Westerners’ who are ‘developing’.
- ^{iv} Use of plural pronouns, in the context of making generalised statements, is widespread in much Anglophone writing, ignoring major questions of who exactly is included in this plurality, and how many may feel marginalised or excluded .
- ^v The policy implications of the research are available at <https://blogs.reading.ac.uk/deathinthefamilyinsenegal/policy-brief/> [accessed 4/08/2018]
- ^{vi} In this regard, Thompson’s discussion of the mutually constitutive nature of individuals and society through the analogy of coffee and cream rather than soup and a bowl, may be helpful (see Thompson et al., 2016).
- ^{vii} Where meanings are put into words, this still of course creates major issues of interpretation, compounded when working across different languages (Evans et al., 2017a)
- ^{viii} This contrasts, then, with the ecological model of Bronfenbrenner (1979) for understanding children’s lives, which is quite widely taken up in social work.
- ^{ix} We are conscious that these access routes to our interviewees may have led to the inclusion of families who are more stable and ‘respectable’ than others might have been, who may have been less familiar to our gatekeepers.
- ^x Interviews were also undertaken with policy leaders and national politicians, but these are not the focus of analysis here. Full details of the methodology are discussed in Evans et al., (2016) .
- ^{xi} One aspect of the social structuring and time trajectories of academic research is that the fieldworkers, who may be closest to the experiences being explored, are likely to be contract researchers, with time limitations on their involvement in processes of writing. See Evans et al., 2017b for further discussion.
- ^{xii} See Bowlby et al., in progress, for further discussion.
- ^{xiii} And see also Mariama Ba’s fictionalised account (1980/2008) which provides a much more conflicted picture of Senegalese support practices after a death.
- ^{xiv} Actor Network Theory is one approach that seeks to create new sociological perspectives on the connections between objects and people, particularly through the notion of the assemblage (Fox, 2015). Gergen (2011) also seeks to develop a very different theoretical perspective, seeing experience as occurring in the spaces between people and objects, such that it is meaning-less to separate out one from the other.
- ^{xv} Walter (2017) discusses how bereavement research and support in the UK in the 1950s highlighted economic problems; only later did the inner emotional journey take centre stage.
- ^{xvi} The implications of Jullien’s work for the development of inter-cultural dialogue are discussed at greater length in Ribbens McCarthy and Gillies, 2018.
- ^{xvii} Refer to endnote ii for the specific political meaning of this term ‘Majority’ here.
- ^{xviii} Indicative evidence for this brief sketch includes: Wambach, 1986; Ribbens McCarthy, 2006; Valentine, 2006; Breen and O’Connor, 2007, 2011; Stroebe, 2010; Jakoby, 2012; Thompson et al., 2016

REFERENCES

- ANSD. (2013). *Rapport de la deuxième enquête de suivi de la pauvreté au Sénégal de 2011 (ESPS II)*. Dakar: Ministère de l’Economie et des Finances, République du Sénégal.
- ANSD. (2014) *Recensement général de la population et de l’habitat, de l’agriculture et de l’élevage 2013, Rapport définitif*. Dakar: ANSD & Ministère de l’Economie, des Finances et du Plan, République du Sénégal .
- Alladin, W. (2015). The Islamic way of death and dying: homeward bound. In C.M. Parkes, P. Laungani, W. Young (Eds.), *Death and bereavement across cultures* (pp. 110-132). London: Routledge. (2nd edition)

Ba, Mariama 1980/2008 *So Long A Letter*. London: Heinemann

Bass, L. and Sow, F. (2006). Senegalese families: the confluence of ethnicity, history and social change. In Y. Oheneba-Sakyi & B. Takyi (Eds.), *African families at the turn of the 21st century* (pp. 83-102). Westport: Praeger .

Beck, S., De Vreyer, P., Lambert, S., et al. (2015). Child fostering in Senegal. *Journal of Comparative Family Studies*, XLVI, 57-73.

Becker, G, Xander, CJ, Blum, HE et al. (2007) 'Do religious or spiritual beliefs influence bereavement? A systematic review'. *Palliative Medicine*. 21(3) 207–217

[Bhambra](#), G. K., and Santos, [B. \(2017\)](#). Introduction: global challenges for Sociology. *Sociology*, 51, p3-10.

Bignante, E. (2015). Therapeutic landscapes of traditional healing: building spaces of well-being with the traditional healer in St. Louis, Senegal. *Social and Cultural Geography*, 16, 698-713.

Bonanno, G. A., Papa, A., Lalande, K. et al. (2005). Grief processing and deliberate grief avoidance: a prospective comparison of bereaved spouses and parents in the United States and the People's Republic of China. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 73, 86–98.

Bowlby, S., (2012) Recognising the time—space dimensions of care: caringscapes and carescapes . *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space* , 44(9) 2101-2118

Bowlby, S., Evans, R., Ribbens McCarthy, J., and Wouango, J. (in progress) Caring and coping after a death in the family in a majority Muslim context.

Breen, L. J. & O'Connor, M. (2007). The fundamental paradox in the grief literature: a critical reflection. *Omega, Journal of Death and Dying*, 55, 199-218.

Breen, L. J. and O'Connor, M. (2011). Family and social networks after bereavement: experiences of support, change and isolation. *Journal of Family Therapy*, 33, 98-120.

Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979) *The ecology of human development*. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press.

Cacciatore, J. & J. DeFrain (Eds.) (2015) *The world of bereavement: cultural perspectives on death in families*. Cham: Springer

Callaghan, J., Gambo, Y. & Fellin, L. (2015). Hearing the silences: adult Nigerian women's accounts of early marriages. *Feminism & Psychology*, 25, 506-527.

Center for the Advancement of Health. (2004). Report on bereavement and grief research. *Death Studies*, 28, 491-575.

Cole, J & Thomas, L. M. (Eds.) (2009) *Love in Africa*. University of Chicago Press.

Connell, R. (2014). Sociology for the whole world. *International Sociology*, 26, 288-91.

Corden, P. A. & Hirst, M. A. (2013). Economic components of grief. *Death Studies*. 725-749.

Creevey, L. (1996). Islam, women and the role of the State in Senegal. *Journal of Religion in Africa* 26 (3): 268–307.

Demmer, C. (2007). Grief is a luxury: AIDS-related loss in South Africa. *Illness, Crisis and Loss*, 15, 39-51.

Diop, A. B. (1985/2012) *La famille Wolof*. Paris: Karthala.

Eisenbruch, M. & Handelman, L. (1990). Cultural consultation for cancer: astrocytoma in a Cambodian adolescent. *Social Science and Medicine*, 31, 1295-1299.

Esposito, JL (2018) 'The many faces of Islam', <https://www.theiarj.org/religion-resources/primer-on-islam/> [accessed 02/08/2018]

Evans, R. (2012) Sibling caringscapes: time-space practices of caring within youth-headed households in Tanzania and Uganda. *Geoforum*, 43, 824-835

Evans, R. (2014) Parental death as a vital conjuncture? Intergenerational care and responsibility following bereavement in Senegal. *Social & Cultural Geography*, 15(5), 547-570

Evans, R. (2015) Working with legal pluralism: widowhood, property inheritance and poverty alleviation in urban Senegal. *Gender and Development*. 23(1), 77–94.

Evans, R. (in press) Widowhood and property inheritance among the Serer in Senegal. In B. M'Baye and B. Muhonja (eds) *Gender and Sexuality in Senegalese Societies*.

Evans, R., Ribbens McCarthy, J., Bowlby, S., Wouango, J. and Kébé, F. (2016) *Responses to Death, Care and Family Relations in Urban Senegal*, RESEARCH REPORT 1, Human Geography Research Cluster, UNIVERSITY OF READING,
<HTTP://BLOGS.READING.AC.UK/DEATHINTHEFAMILYINSENEGAL/FILES/2016/02/EVANS-ET-AL-2016-REPORT.PDF>

Evans, R., Ribbens McCarthy, J., Kébé, F., Bowlby, S., and Wouango, J. (2017a) Interpreting 'grief' in Senegal: language, emotions and cross-cultural translation in a francophone African context. *Mortality*, 22(2), 118-135.

Evans, R., Ribbens McCarthy, J., Bowlby, S., Wouango, J. and Kébé, F. (2017b) Producing emotionally sensed knowledge? Reflexivity and emotions in researching responses to death. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 20(6), 585-598.

Evans, R., Bowlby, S., Ribbens McCarthy, J., Wouango, J. and Kebe, F. (2018, in press) 'It's God's will': Consolation and religious meaning-making after a family death in urban Senegal. In *Space, Grief and Bereavement: Consolationscapes*, C. Jedan, A. Maddrell and E. Venbrux (Eds) Routledge.

Fall, A., Antoine, P., Cissé, R. et al. (2011). *The dynamics of poverty in Senegal: Chronic poverty, transitional poverty and vulnerabilities*. Policy Brief, LARTES National Studies No.27.

Faye, A. (1997) *Le thème de la mort dans la littérature Sereer*. Dakar, Les Nouvelles Editions Africaines du Sénégal.

Finch, J and Mason, J (2000) *Passing On: Kinship and Inheritance in England*. London: Routledge.

Folta, J. & Deck, E. (1988). The impact of children's death on Shona mothers and families. *Journal of Comparative Family Studies*, 19, 433-451.

Fox, N. (2015). Emotions, affects and the production of social life. *British Journal of Sociology*, 66, 301-18.

Gay y Blasco, P. (2005) Love, suffering and grief among Spanish Gitanos. In K. Milton & M. Svašek (Eds.), *Mixed emotions: anthropological studies of feeling* (pp. 163-178). Oxford: Berg.

-
- Gergen, K. (2011). *Relational being: Beyond self and community*. Oxford University Press.
- Gifford, P. (2016). Religion in contemporary Senegal. *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, 31, 255-267.
- Granek, L. (2017). Is grief a disease? The medicalization of grief by the psy-disciplines in the twenty first century. In N. Thompson & G. R. Cox (Eds.), *Handbook of the sociology of death, grief and bereavement: A guide to theory and practice* (pp. 264-277). . London: Routledge.
- Hallam, E. & J. Hockey (2001) *Death, memory and material culture*. London: Bloomsbury Academic.
- Harris, D. (2010). Oppression of the bereaved: a critical analysis of grief in Western society. *Omega: Journal of Death and Dying*, 60, 241-53.
- Hewlett, B. (2005). Vulnerable lives: the experiences of death and loss among Aka and Nganda adolescents of the Central African Republic. In B. Hewlett & M. Lamb (Eds.), *Hunter-gatherer childhoods: Evolutionary, developmental and cultural perspectives* (pp. 322-342). New Brunswick, New Jersey: Transaction Publishers .
- Horwitz, A. V. & Wakefield, J. C. (2007) *The loss of sadness: How psychiatry transformed normal sorrow into depressive disorder*. Oxford University Press.
- Iyenda, G. and Simon, D. (2006) 'Gender relations, bread winning and family life in Kinshasa', in M. Murray and G. Myers (Eds.), *Cities iin Contemporary Africa* (pp. 221-236). Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Jacquemin, M. (2010). *Urbanization, social change and child protection in West and Central Africa*. Dakar: UNICEF West and Central Africa Regional Office.
- Jakoby, N. (2012). Grief as a social emotion: theoretical perspectives. *Death Studies*, 36, 679-711.
- Jalland, P. (2012). A culture of silent grief? The transformation of bereavement care in 20th century England. *Bereavement Care*, 32, 16-22.
- Johnson-Hanks, J. (2002). On the limits of life stages in ethnography: toward a theory of vital conjunctures. *American Anthropologist*, 104, 865-880.
- Jullien, F. (2008/2014). *On the universal, the uniform, the common and dialogue between cultures*, Cambridge: Polity Press. (Translated by M. Richardson & F. Krzysztof)
- Klass, D. (1999). Developing a cross-cultural model of grief. *Omega, Journal of Death & Dying*, 39, 153-178.
- Klass, D. (2014). Grief, consolation, and religions: a conceptual framework. *Omega, Journal of Death and Dying*, 69, 1-18.
- Kleinman, A. (2001). Why psychiatry and cultural anthropology still need each other. *Psychiatry*, 64, 14-16 March 1st.
- Kleinman, A. (2007). Psychiatry without context: turning sadness into disease. *The Lancet*, 370, 819-820.
- Kleinman, A. (2012). Culture, bereavement and psychiatry. *The Lancet*, 379, 608-609 18th-24th February.

-
- Kleinman, A. & Kleinman, J. (1991). Suffering and its professional transformation: towards an ethnography of interpersonal experience. *Culture, Medicine and Psychiatry*, 15, 275-301.
- Lofland, L. H. (1985). The social shaping of grief. *Symbolic Interaction*, 8, 171-190 .
- Lukes, S. (2008). *Moral relativism*. London: Profile Books.
- Marris, P. (1958/2014). *Widows and their families*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Mauthner, N. & Doucet, A. (2008). What can be known and how? Narrated subjects. *Qualitative Research*, 8, 399-409.
- McLea, H.F. & Mayers, P. (2017). The grief and trauma project. *Social Work (South Africa)*, 53, 423-44.
- MEFP (2014). (Ministère de l'Economie, des Finances et du Plan), ANSD, DGPSSN, UNICEF Sénégal et EMAP. *Actualisation de l'étude sur la pauvreté et les disparités chez les enfants au Sénégal*. Dakar, Décembre.
- Miller, D. & Parrott, F. (2009). Loss and material culture in South London. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 15, 502-519.
- Nadeau, J. W. (1990). *Families making sense of death*. London: Sage.
- Ndiaye, L. (2009). *Parenté et mort chez les Wolof: Traditions et modernité au Sénégal*. Paris, L'Harmattan.
- Ndiaye, L. (2012). *Mort et thérapie en Afrique. Enjeux, représentations et symboles*. Paris: L'Harmattan.
- Neimeyer, R. (Ed.) (2001) *Meaning reconstruction and the experience of loss*. Washington: American Psychological Association.
- Neimeyer, R., Klass, D. & Dennis, M. R. (2014). A social constructionist account of grief: loss and the narration of meaning. *Death Studies*, 38, 485–498.
- Nel, P.J. (2008). Morality and religion in African thought. *Acta Theologica*, 28, 33–47.
- Njue, J.M., Rombo, D., Lutomia, A.N. et al. (2015) Death, grief and culture in Kenya: experiential strengths-based research. In J. Caciattore & J. DeFrain (Eds.), (2015) *The world of bereavement: cultural perspectives on death in fFamilies* (pp. 3-24). Cham: Springer.
- Nordanger, Dag (2007) 'Discourses of loss and bereavement in Tigray, Ethiopia'. *Culture, Medicine and Psychiatry*. 32(2): 173-194.
- Nwoye, A. (2005). Memory healing processes and community intervention in grief work in Africa. *ANZJFT*, 26, 147-154.
- [Nwoye, A. & Nwoye, C. M. A. \(2012\). **Memory and narrative healing processes in grief work in Africa. *Journal of Family Psychotherapy*, 23, 138-158.**](#)
- Oheneba-Sakyi, Y. & Takyi, B. (2006). Introduction to the study of African families: A framework for analysis. In Y. Oheneba-Sakyi & B. Takyi (Eds.), *African families at the turn of the 21st century* (pp. 1-23). Dubuque, Iowa: Kendall/Hunt.

Palgi, P. & Abramovitch, H. (1984). Death: a cross-cultural perspective. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 13, 385–417.

Punch, S. (2016). [Cross-world and cross-disciplinary dialogue: a more integrated, global approach to childhood studies](#). *Global Studies of Childhood*, 6, 352-364.

Reddy, W.M. (2001). *The navigation of feeling: A framework for the history of emotions*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press

Ribbens McCarthy, J. (2006) *Young People's Experiences of Loss and Bereavement: Towards an Interdisciplinary Approach*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Ribbens McCarthy, J. (2012a) Caring after death: issues of embodiment and relationality. In C. Rogers and S. Weller (Eds.), *Critical Approaches to Care: Understanding Caring Relations, Identities and Cultures* (pp.183-194). London: Routledge.

Ribbens McCarthy, J. (2012b) [**The powerful relational language of 'family': togetherness, belonging and personhood**](#). *Sociological Review*, 60(1): 68-90

Ribbens McCarthy, J., Doolittle, M., and Day Sclater, S. (2012) [**Understanding Family Meanings: A Reflective Text**](#). Bristol: Policy Press.

Ribbens McCarthy, J. and Edwards, R. (2011) *Key Concepts in Family Studies*. London: Sage

Ribbens McCarthy, J. and Gillies, V. (2018) [**Troubling children's families: who's troubled and why? Approaches to inter-cultural dialogue**](#). *Sociological Research Online*. 23(1): 219-244

Ribbens McCarthy, J. and Prokhovnik, R. (2014) Embodied relationality and caring after death. *Body & Society*, 20(2): 18-43

Rosenblatt, P. C. (2001) A social constructionist perspective on cultural differences in grief. In M. S. Stroebe, R. O. Hansson, W. Stroebe, & H. Schut (Eds.), *Handbook of bereavement research: Consequences, Coping, and Care* (pp. 285-300). Washington: American Psychological Association.

Rosenblatt, P. C. (2007). [Recovery following bereavement: metaphor, phenomenology and culture](#). *Death Studies*, 32, 6-16.

Rosenblatt, P. C. (2008). Grief across cultures: A review and research agenda. In M. S. Stroebe, R. O. Hansson, H. Schut, & W. Stroebe (Eds.), *Handbook of bereavement research and practice: Advances in theory and intervention* (pp. 207-222). Washington, DC, US: American Psychological Association.

Rosenblatt, P. C. (2015). Grief in small scale societies. In C. M. Parkes, P. Laungani, & W. Young (Eds.), *Death and bereavement across cultures* (pp. 23-41). Hove: Routledge. 2nd ed.

Rosenblatt, P. C., Walsh, R. P. & Jackson, D. A. (1976). *Grief and mourning in cross-cultural perspective*. New Haven: HRAF Press.

Squire, C. (2008). 'Experience centred and culturally-oriented approaches to narrative. In M. Andrews, C. Squire, & M. Tamboukou, Maria (Eds.), *Doing nNarrative research* (pp. 47-72). London: Sage.

Sogolo, G. S. (2003) The concept of cause in African thought. In P. H. Coetzee & A. P. J. Roux (Eds.), *The African philosophy reader* (pp. 192-199). New York: Routledge. 2nd ed. .

-
- Sow, F. (2003). Fundamentalisms, globalisation and women's human rights in Senegal. *Gender and Development*, 11, 69–76.
- Stroebe, M. (2010). Bereavement in a family context: coping with the loss of a loved one. *Family Science*, 1, 144-151.
- Thomas, L. V. (1968/2013). *Cinq essais sur la mort Africaine*. Paris, Editions Karthala.
- Thompson, N., Allan, J., Carverhill, P. A. et al. (2016). The case for a sociology of dying, death and bereavement. *Death Studies*, 40, 1-10.
- Tronto, J. (1993). *Moral boundaries. A political argument for an ethic of care*. New York and London: Routledge.
- Valentine, C. (2006). Academic constructions of bereavement. *Mortality*, 11, 57-78.
- Valentine, C. (2008). *Bereavement narratives: Continuing bonds in the twenty-first century*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Van der Geest, S. (2004). Dying peacefully: considering good death and bad death in Kwahu-Tafo, Ghana. *Social Science & Medicine*, 58, 899-911.
- Villalón, L. A. (1999). Generational changes, political stagnation and the evolving dynamics of religion and politics in Senegal. *Africa Today*, 46, 129-147.
- Walter, T. (2006). What is complicated grief? A social constructionist perspective. *Omega: Journal of Death and Dying*, 52, 71-9.
- Walter, T. (2017). *What death means now*. Bristol: Policy Press.
- Wambach, J. A. (1986). 'The grief process as a social construct. *Omega: Journal of Death and Dying*, 16, 201-11.
- Wikan, U. (1988). Bereavement and loss in two Muslim communities: Egypt and Bali compared. *Social Science & Medicine*, 27, 451-460.
- Woodthorpe, K., Rumble, H. & Valentine, C. (2013). Putting 'the grave' into social policy: state support for funerals in contemporary UK society. *Journal of social policy*, 42, 605-622.